

 **Sermon & Kids Message Week 4** **– Real Community**

**1 Corinthians 12: 12-27**

**Kids Message/Sermon Hook:**

*Ask your whole congregation to stand up and participate in the interactive story, ‘The Rainbow That Nearly Wasn’t.’ This functions as the kids message/sermon hook. If you don’t have any children present at worship, you can still do this with the adults! Alternatively, you can simply read out the story without any audience participation.*

*Divide the congregation into six groups (as per the colours below). Do this by giving a coloured item of clothing (e.g. scarf, hat) to six people spread across the church (try to give one to a child if using this as the kids message).*

*Audience participation: tell everyone that when they hear their colour speaking in the story, they need to stand up (if they’re able) and do the following action continuously:*

red = pump your fist in the air

orange = make a big round O shape with your hands

yellow = wave your hands like a sunrise

green = shake your hands (and head) from side to side

blue = move your arm like a wave on the sea

purple = wave like the Queen

*All colours will need to stand up at the end and do their actions simultaneously too.*

The Rainbow That Nearly Wasn’t

God rubbed his hands in glee. The terrible Flood was over! There were the animals coming out of the ark – trotting, wobbling, slithering, flying or trundling down onto the mountaintop! There was Noah and his family building the altar to say thank you for their rescue! And God had a lovely surprise in store for them. Something that would finish off their adventure with a beautiful ending that would be remembered for thousands of years to come.

‘Oh, colours!’ called God. ‘It’s your big moment to shine!’

The gorgeous colours appeared around God’s throne. But God could see that something wasn’t quite right. Orange was scowling. Red was grumpy. Blue was kicking the floor. Green was in a strop. Yellow had turned his back on everyone else and Purple seemed about ready to burst into tears.

‘What in heaven is going on?’ asked God.

The first colour to speak was Red. ‘You said you want to put a bow in the sky,’ she said. ‘Well, I think it should be red. Just red. Nothing but red. Don’t mess about with this bunch of losers. Make it red.’

‘Why?’ asked God*.*

‘Because red is the boss of the colours. People really notice red. Red is hot and bright – the colour for fire and blood and traffic signs. If you want this bow to be noticed, you need it to be red.’

‘I see,’ murmured God.

‘No! No! No! No!’ squeaked Yellow. ‘Your bow should be a beautiful yellow colour, Lord! Make it as yellow as the sunshine! As yellow as bananas! Make it bright and cheerful and shiny like me! Make it just yellow!’

‘You are very beautiful,’ agreed God.

‘But you’re not as important as me!’ Purple said pompously. ‘Look! It’s obvious your bow should be purple. Purple is the colour of emperors and kings. Purple is the sign of the most important. If you want power, pick pure purple.’

‘I do like purple,’ said God.

‘But you don’t want a silly purple bow!’ shouted Green. ‘Wheee! Look at me! Imagine a green bow in the sky! Now that would be really wow! Green is so zingy! So fizzy! So fresh! Like a bottle of green Solo sprayed across the sky. Don’t mix me up with these other dull colours – make your bow green!’

‘Oh please,’ called Orange. ‘It’s so obvious that Orange is the colour you want. Orange like the sunrise. Orange is fruity and juicy and ripe! Make your bow orange, Lord!’

‘You are so, like, unhip, man, ‘said Blue. ‘It is so like, obvious that God’s bow should be blue. Blue as the sea and sky, blue like rhythm ‘n’ blues. Blue like Sonic the Hedgehog blue or Bluey blue. Blue is like the coolest colour in your box, Lord. I just know you’re going to make your bow blue, blue, blue.’

*(All colours stand up and do their action at the same time)*

Instantly all the colours started shouting at each other.
‘Blue is boring!’
‘Red is rubbish!’
‘Purple’s pathetic!’
‘Yellow is so last year!’
‘Green is gross!’
‘Orange sucks!’
‘Make your bow red! Blue! Yellow! Orange! Green! Purple!’

Then God raised one hand and spoke in a voice that no-one could disobey. ‘Be quiet.’ *(All the colours sit down)*

When the colours had settled down, trembling, God smiled at them.

‘You are all just what I want you to be. Each of you does a different job. Without you, I couldn’t do this most important job of all. I need to give my people a sign of my promise. I need them to know it is a perfect promise that will never be broken. I need them to know that it is for all people of all ages from all countries for all times. And so, my dear, dear colours, I need you all. Please, just for a moment, look at each other through my eyes.’

So, the colours looked at each other and, now that they were looking through God’s eyes, they saw just how beautiful each of the others were. With a big smile, they stood together and together they counted down: 3, 2, 1. And then down below, Noah and all the animals looked up in amazement. For there, between heaven and earth, shone a radiant multi-coloured rainbow. Red, orange, yellow, green, blue & purple – all the colours, all different, but all together.

*Take home message for the children: Sometimes we might behave like the bossy colours, but God still wants to include us in his rainbow. I.e. although we don’t always get along with one another, God forgives us and calls us to work together to tell others about Jesus.*

**Sermon:**

Friends, *The Rainbow That Nearly Wasn’t* is a great illustration of the church that the apostle Paul wrote to in 1 & 2 Corinthians. The Corinthian Christians behaved in much the same way as the colours that God used to make the rainbow. They pridefully promoted themselves and bickered with one another. They struggled to get along. In fact, if you read through 1 Corinthians and highlight all the problems this Church had, you’d be forgiven for questioning whether or not they were actually a Christian community!

The Corinthian Christians were divided into factions based on which leader they followed - be it Paul, Apollos, Peter or someone else. They had forgotten that they all followed Jesus; they all had the same Lord and Saviour. And some of them were bringing lawsuits against each other rather than trying to resolve their differences through forgiveness and reconciliation. Pride, stubbornness, arrogance and disharmony tainted their community.

Their disunity was also evident in their worship of God. There were members who were guilty of coming to Holy Communion and making it all about them. They would commune only in their exclusive cliques rather than as a whole church. And when it came to exercising their spiritual gifts, it was every man for himself. They didn’t seek to use their gifts to edify one another, to build up the body of Christ, but rather to show off how spiritually mature they supposedly were.

What a motley crew; what a messy and sin-riddled body they were! The eyes were saying to the hands, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the arms were saying to the legs, torso and head, ‘We’re a perfectly good body without you! We’re all arms and that’s the way we like it!’ Can you imagine a body that is all arms and not much else? It would be deprived of the many functions the other parts of the body provide. Thus, the Corinthian church was malfunctioning and behaving very much like a disembodied entity.

Yet God in his great mercy didn’t give up on them. He worked through Paul to graciously confront their divisions, selfishness & pride. He patiently brought these bickering believers together in Christ and transformed their church culture and communion with one another. We hear evidence of this reunified body throughout 2 Corinthians, which has a more positive and celebratory tone than Paul’s many rebukes in 1 Corinthians.

And despite the Corinthian believers’ struggle with their inherent stubbornness and pride, God wanted to use them to create a beautiful rainbow across the skies of Corinth. He wanted to work through them to bring his promises of salvation and new life in Christ to those outside of the church.

Given that Paul’s primary focus in 1 & 2 Corinthians is to address the problems that were evident in the Corinthian church, he doesn’t explicitly encourage the Corinthian believers in their participation in God’s mission. However, his missional heart is embedded throughout these letters. Therefore, when he encouraged his hearers to imitate his way of life in Christ (1 Corinthians 4:14-17), this included working together as one to share the Gospel with others.

Friends, whenever I read through 1 Corinthians, I can’t help but think of the LCA. Because *The Rainbow That Nearly Wasn’t* is not only a great illustration of the Corinthian church, but also the Lutheran Church of Australia. We too have got legs telling arms they don’t need them, and pinky fingernails telling pinky fingers that they’ll be just fine without them.

We too struggle with factions and deep-seated disagreements. Think of the ‘worship wars’ of years gone by. Or the deep divide that currently runs through the body because of the disagreement about women’s ordination. And we too struggle to use our spiritual gifts and resources to support one another. Instead of working together to build up the body of Christ, we stick to our silos and neglect the less presentable parts of the body which need special attention. Pride, stubbornness, arrogance and disharmony also taint our Christian communities.

But thankfully, just like the Corinthian believers, we also have Jesus as our head. Our Lord and Saviour graciously holds us together with his body and blood despite our best efforts to pull ourselves apart. He draws us together by the power of his death and resurrection, forgives our sin, and calls us to reach out to the lost as one body. He calls us to contribute to the rainbow of his promises that he’s painting in the skies of our local communities- even though I often think he could do a much better job without us! What a merciful Saviour we have!

Friends, as we hear the about colours who begrudgingly worked together to form a rainbow as well as the bickering Christians at Corinth, we receive a clear picture of what constitutes real Christian community. We see that real community consists of believers who struggle to get along with one another because of sin, and therefore recognise their need for the real grace and forgiveness that is found only in Jesus Christ. The Corinthian Christians - or at least some of them - seemed to recognise this reality. This is evident in 2 Corinthians 7:8-13, where Paul commends them for their godly sorrow and repentance in response to the strong words of rebuke in one of his letters.

Those who live in real Christian community recognise that God’s ongoing forgiveness and the Holy Spirit’s power is necessary for both the creation and sustaining of their community. They also recognise that only God’s Spirit through his Word can produce growth in its members’ Christ-mindedness. Paul mentions one aspect of this growth when describing how the members of Christ’s body are to relate to one another: ‘*If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.*’ (1 Corinthians 12:26)

Our Lord Jesus gave us a great example of what it means to suffer with other members of his body as he hung dying on the cross. As his lifeblood drained from his body, Jesus reached out to his grieving mother and the disciple whom he loved - who isn’t actually named (John 19:26-27). In this moment, he was both suffering for Mary and his disciple’s sin and suffering with them in their grief and uncertainty about their future post-crucifixion. Hence why he encouraged them to care for one another when he was gone.

So then, as those who are bathed in God’s grace and empowered by God’s Spirit, are we committed to living and growing in real community? Are you prepared to suffer and rejoice with anyone in your church family, even those whom you clash with? Are you willing to suffer with someone from a neighbouring congregation or parish? And are you able to honour someone who holds a different view on women’s ordination than you do? If we’re honest, I think God’s Spirit would be telling us that we all have room to grow.

This growth is important not just for the health of our church community, but also for our participation in God’s mission. Because the more we suffer and rejoice with one another, the better equipped we are to suffer and rejoice with those ‘out there.’ Unbelievers need to look at the church and see a real community of sinner-saints who are suffering and rejoicing with one another because that’s when they see Jesus suffering and rejoicing with them.

So friends, let’s embrace the real community that God has created through Jesus. Let’s live as the body of Christ by suffering and rejoicing with one another as we seek to bring Jesus to a lost and dying world. And as we do, we can trust that Jesus will stick with us, his motley crew of disciples.

And the peace of God, which we experience as we live in real Christian community, keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.